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## THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART PRESENTS

# Okwui Okpokwasili and Peter Born: *adaku, part 1: the road opens*

Friday, May 12, 2023

[Access live captioning for Friday's performance -->](#)

Saturday, May 13, 2023

[Access live captioning for Saturday's performance -->](#)

In this chapter of a larger speculative mythology, a precolonial African village is at the cusp of a major upheaval. The community is entangled in an argument that could shape the future of all of their lives. This collective reckoning explores the fraught relationship between ancestors, future generations, and the role of ritual. A sonic and visual landscape of reflective textures, contouring shadows, and thrumming facilitates an intimate exchange between performers and the audience.

### COMPANY HISTORY

Sweat Variant describes the collaborative practice of Okwui Okpokwasili and Peter Born. We are partners in our work and our lives. Since 1996, we have been working at the intersection of dance, theater, and visual art to make challenging and rigorous work that explores the many meanings entangled in the bodies of Black women.

We are interested in building a spectacle of radical intimacy, where performers and audience are acknowledged as being locked in a mutual gaze. We build gestural vocabularies and narrative frameworks that are concerned with the problem of memory in the inherent instability of the construction of a persona.

We hope to activate a space that allows the audience to question who they are looking at and how they are looking. We hope this creates a critical space of wonderment, of uncertainty, and of mystery. It is in this space that we believe we can see each other anew.

### Conceived and written by

Okwui Okpokwasili

### Directed by

Peter Born and Okwui Okpokwasili

### Music by

Peter Born and Okwui Okpokwasili

### Choreography conceived by

Okwui Okpokwasili and Peter Born in collaboration with the cast

### Performed by

mayfield brooks, McKenzie Frye, Audrey Hailes, Okwui Okpokwasili, Samita Sinha, Stacy Lynn Smith, AJ Wilmore

### Set / lighting / video design

Peter Born

### Sound design

Peter Born and Will Johnson

### Production manager and technical director

Michaelangelo DeSerio

### Costume co-design and fabrication

James Gibbel

### Dramaturg

Katherine Profeta

### ICA PRODUCTION CREW

#### Master Electrician

Andrew Andrews

#### Electricians

Violet Gayzagian, Wesley Scanlon, Brian Vlasak

#### Master Carpenter

Taylor Hansen

#### Stagehands

Jack Riter, Greg Hanawalt, Jakob Mall, Cidalia Santos, Colby Stack

#### Wardrobe Supervisor

Nancy Flessas

#### Audio Engineer

Kevin Corzett

#### Brighter Boston Interns

Edwiana LaMontagne, Riahna Graciani

*adaku, part 1: the road opens* was commissioned by the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston and co-commissioned by the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

*adaku, part 1: the road opens* was developed in a Studio Residency at The Museum of Modern Art, as part of the Hyundai Card Performance Series, and a 2023 Summer Stages Dance @ ICA/Boston residency. Summer Stages Dance @ ICA/Boston is made possible, in part, with the support of Jane Karol and Howard Cooper, George and Ann Colony, David Parker, The Aliad Fund, and Stephanie and Leander McCormick-Goodhart. *adaku, part 1: the road opens* was also developed during a residency at the Brown Arts Institute at Brown University and a residency at the Mercury Store in Brooklyn, NY.

Support for this performance is generously provided by Leslie Riedel and Scott Friend.

Like the show? Let us know!



#ICABoston



# BIOGRAPHIES

## Okwui Okpokwasili

Okwui Okpokwasili is a Brooklyn-based performer, choreographer, and writer creating multidisciplinary performance pieces. The child of immigrants from Nigeria, Okpokwasili was born and raised in the Bronx, and the histories of these places and the girls and women who inhabit them feature prominently in much of her work. Her highly experimental productions include the Bessie Award-winning *Pent-Up: A Revenge Dance* and *Bronx Gothic*, and *Poor People's TV Room*, *When I Return Who Will Receive Me*, and *Adaku's Revolt*. Recent works include installations in the exhibitions: *Grief and Grievance*, *Art and Mourning in America* at the New Museum, *Witchhunt* at the Hammer Museum in LA, and *Sex Ecologies* at Kunsthall Trondheim in Norway. Commissions include the performance *On the way, undone* at the High Line in New York City and at Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn as part of FIAF's Crossing the Line Festival, the film *Returning* for Danspace Project, and the site-specific performance *Swallow the Moon* at Jacob's Pillow. Okpokwasili has worked with film and theater directors Carrie Mae Weems, Ralph Lemon, Arthur Jafa, Terence Nance, Josephine Decker, Mika Rottenberg, Mahyad Tousi, Charlotte Brathwaite, Jim Findlay, Annie Dorsen, and Peter Born.

Okpokwasili's residencies and awards include the French American Cultural Exchange (2006–07); Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography Choreographic Fellowship (2012); Baryshnikov Arts Center Artist-in-Residence (2013); New York Live Arts Studio Series (2013); Under Construction at the Park Avenue Armory (2013); New York Foundation for the Arts' Fellowship in Choreography (2013); Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Extended Life Program (2014–17, 2019–20); Institute for Cultural Practice in Performance at Wesleyan (2015), the Foundation for Contemporary Arts' artist grant in dance (2014); BRIClab (2015); Columbia University (2015), the Rauschenberg Residency (2015), the Mellon Creative Futures Fellowship at Carolina Performing Arts, UNC Chapel Hill (2018–2021). Okpokwasili was the 2015–17 Randjelovic/Stryker New York Live Arts Resident Commissioned Artist (RCA.) She was a 2018 Princeton University Hodder Fellow, a 2018 Herb Alpert Awardee in dance, an Antonyo Awardee, a 2018 Doris Duke Artist Awardee, and a 2018 MacArthur Fellow. She was the inaugural artist for the Kravis Studio Residency program at MOMA in 2022.

## Peter Born

Peter Born works as a director, composer, and designer of performance and installation, often in collaboration with Okwui Okpokwasili, with whom he has created the installation *repose without rest without end* in Trondheim (2021), *Swallow the Moon* at Jacob's Pillow (2021), *on the way, undone* at the High Line (2021), *Poor People's TV Room (SOLO) installation* at the New Museum and the Hammer Museum (2021), *Sitting on a Man's Head* (2019) at Danspace Project, *Adaku's Revolt* (2019) at Abrons Arts Center, *At the Anterior Edge* (2018) with the Barnard Dance Department, *Poor People's TV Room* (2017), *when I return, who will receive me* (2016), *Bronx Gothic (The Oval)* (2014), *Bronx Gothic* (2013) and *pent-up: a revenge dance* (2009), as well as an album they produced together, *day pulls down the sky* (2019). Their work has also appeared in the Berlin Biennale and at the Tate Museum, London. He has collaborated with David Thomson as a director, designer, and writer on *The Venus Knot* (2017) and *he his own mythical beast* (2018), and as a set designer for Nora Chipaumire's *rite/riot* (2014) and *El Capitan Kinglady* (2016). His work *Poor People's TV Room (SOLO)*, created in collaboration with Okwui Okpokwasili, is in the collections of the Hammer Museum and the Whitney Museum. Four of Peter's collaborations have garnered New York Dance Performance Bessie Awards. His work as an art director and prop stylist has been featured in video and photo projects with *Vogue*, Estee Lauder, Barney's Co-op, Bloomingdales, Old Navy, "25" magazine, the *Wall Street Journal*, and No Strings Puppet Productions. He is a former New York public high school teacher, itinerant floral designer, corporate actor-facilitator, video maker, and furniture designer.

## mayfield brooks

mayfield brooks improvises while Black and is based in Lenapehoking, the unceded land of the Lenape people, also known as Brooklyn, New York. brooks is a movement-based performance artist, vocalist, urban farmer, writer, and wanderer. brooks teaches and performs practices that arise from Improvising While Black (IWB), their interdisciplinary dance methodology that explores the decomposed matter of Black life and engages in dance improvisation, disorientation, dissent, and ancestral healing. brooks is the 2021 recipient of the biennial Merce Cunningham Award from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, a 2021 Bessie/New York Dance and Performance Award nominee for their dance film *Whale Fall*, and a 2022 Danspace Project Platform artist. They are currently a Hodder Fellow at Princeton University. To learn more about their work go to [www.improvingwhileblack.com](http://www.improvingwhileblack.com).

## McKenzie Frye

McKenzie Frye is a multidisciplinary performing artist, songwriter, and choreographer from Detroit, MI. She is also a Howard University graduate with a B.F.A. in musical theater. Frye's Broadway credits include the 2022 revival of *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*. Her Off-Broadway and regional credits include *The Bluest Eye* (Huntington Theatre), *Syncing Ink* (Alley Theatre/The Flea), *Wig Out!* (Vineyard Theatre), *Harriet's Return* starring Debbie Allen (Kennedy Center), *Dreamgirls* (Arkansas Rep), *River Deep* (Peter Jay Sharp Theater), and *Damn Yankees* (The Black Rep). Film and TV credits include *wishing...*, *The Stronger, My Brother*, and *Law & Order*. @mckenziefrye

## Stacy Lynn Smith

Stacy Lynn Smith is a neurodivergent, mixed race/Black performance artist, choreographer, director, and Green Circle Keeper at Hidden Water (by and for those affected by child sexual abuse). Smith has collaborated with an array of talented artists such as DeForrest Brown Jr., Anna Homler, Karen Bernard, Thaddeus O'Neil, Vangelina Theater (2008–17), Michael Freeman (2010–16), Saints of an Unnamed Country, Salome Asega, GENG, Bradley Bailey, Michele Beck, Jasmine Hearn, mayfield brooks, thinkdance, Kathy Westwater, Josephine Decker, Emily Johnson, and more. Smith is a member of jill sigman's artist/activist cohort Body Politic and was selected by Eva Yaa Asantewaa as part of the curatorial board for Black Womxn Summit. Psychic Wormhole (their research platform) reckons with the devastations of trauma and its relationship to memory and the body through the development of their abstract memoir, *RECKONING*, a film being created in collaboration with Alex Romania. Smith is a 2022–2024 Movement Research Artist-in-Residence.

## AJ Wilmore

AJ Wilmore is a Philadelphia-based interdisciplinary artist working with sound, voice, and movement to question language and propose foolishness while contending with identity and visibility. Making love to her fears is the engine driving her creative practice and her work spans the terrain of her tongue while investigating the quality, degree, and stakes of her social and sexual life.

## Audrey Hailes

Audrey Elaine Hailes (she/we) is a dance-theater artist based up and down the Eastern seaboard. She currently works with Maria Bauman as associate artistic director of MBDance and is producing fellow with Urban Bush Women's Choreographic Center Initiative. Hailes has had the privilege of performative and collaborative relationships with Paloma McGregor, Ebony Golden, Nina Angela Mercer, Okwui Okpokwasili, Ani Taj, and others. She has served as movement consultant for institutions such as New York University Abu Dhabi, The Kennedy Center, and Atlantic Theatre Co. Her own choreography has been commissioned by Gibney Dance, Dance Theatre Etc, Movement Research, BAAD!, and New York Live Arts. Hailes is always grateful to be able to tell stories that honor ancestors and reflect the bright black future.

## Samita Sinha

Samita Sinha is an artist, composer, and educator who works with the material of the body and sound, voice and vibration to make multidisciplinary performance works. She embraces the profound precolonial root of the Indian vocal traditions she has studied while releasing their rigidities to create a liberatory language and performative poetics of the voice and body that is emergent, contemporary, and ancient. She has received commissions from Asia Society, Performance Space, Danspace, Rubin Museum, Gibney Dance, and Western Front, and awards from National Endowment of the Arts, Fulbright Foundation, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, National Performance Network, and New York State Council on the Arts. In recent years Sinha has taught embodied sound at Dartmouth College, Princeton University, Swarthmore College, and Movement Research.

## James Gibbel

James Gibbel makes clothing for performing artists. Their work has been worn on performers at Art Basel Miami, the Public Theater's Under the Radar Festival, REDCAT, the Boston Lyric Opera, as well as in basements and the mall. James is based in Brooklyn and is on the web at [jamesgibbel.fyi](http://jamesgibbel.fyi).

## Michaelangelo DeSerio

Michaelangelo DeSerio, Production Manager, Technical and Lighting Director, is very happy to work with Okwui and Peter again. He has worked with them both on various projects for the last seven years and as a company member for the last five. Hailing from Brooklyn but based right now in Malmö, Sweden, Michaelangelo is a multidisciplinary technical theater artist, father, and adventurer actively working in dance and theater both stateside and in Europe. He has been fortunate enough to collaborate with many amazing companies, including Judith Malina's the Living Theatre, Early Morning Opera, Meg Wolfe Dance, the New Wild, Theatre Three Collaborative, and Irondale Ensemble Project. Currently, he serves as the master electrician at Skanes Dansteater in Malmö.

## Will Johnson

Will Johnson is a multimedia artist and composer from New York City. Themes from his work include the black radical tradition, phantom archives, and the latent poetics of digital signal processing. He is the recipient of the Jerome Foundation Fellowship for Sound Art/Composition and the McKnight Foundation's Fellowship for Musicians. His commercial work includes licensed sound and original composition for Acura, GAP, Beats Electronics, and HBO and vocal contributions to 2016 Grammy-winning best electronic album *Skin*. Live performances by Johnson have been commissioned by Lincoln Center, the Kitchen, 92Y, and Mass MoCA. He is currently a doctoral candidate and researcher at Brown University.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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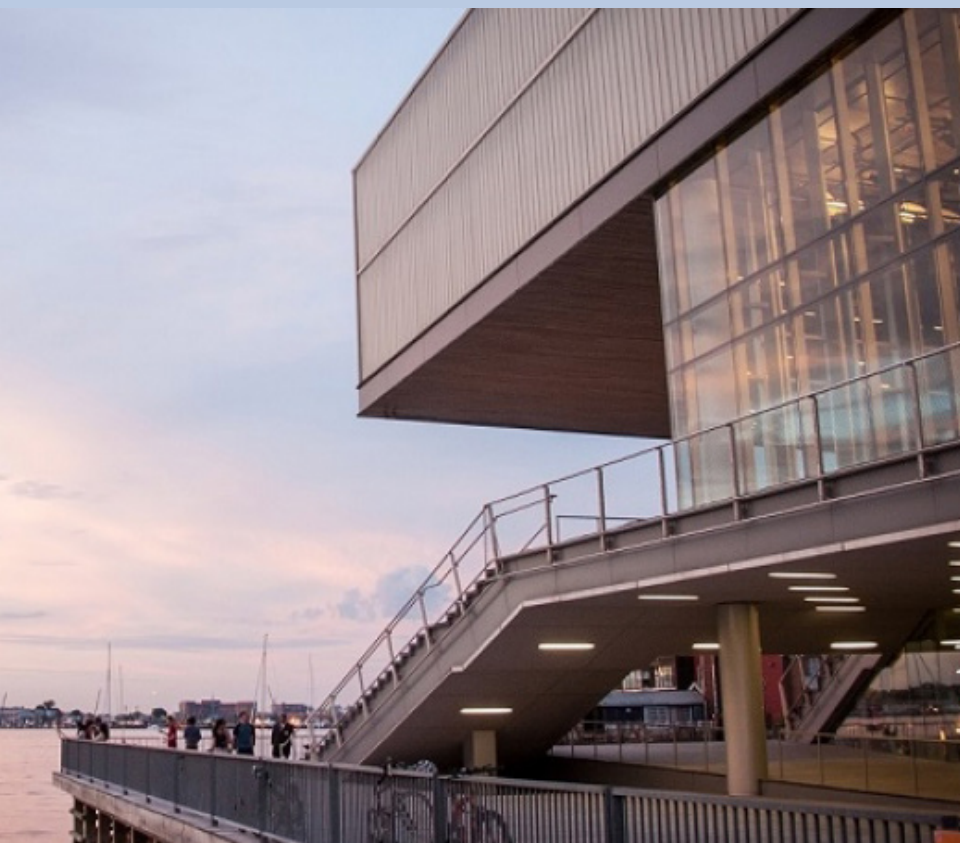
# NOW ON VIEW



Installation view. *Simone Leigh*, Institute of Contemporary Art/ Boston, 2023. Photo by Timothy Schenck.

**Simone Leigh**  
**Apr 6 – Sep 4, 2023**

Simone Leigh (b. 1967, Chicago) represented the United States at the 2022 Venice Biennale, one of the largest and most important contemporary art exhibitions in the world. Selections from Leigh's landmark Venice presentation are making their U.S. premiere in Boston, joined by key works from throughout her career, providing a holistic understanding of the artist's production in ceramic, bronze, and video.



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Photo by Chuck Choi

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